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Enquiries regarding subscriptions to Denise@ibts.eu

Enquiries regarding articles to Journal@ibts.eu

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Editorial

This issue has the focus of ecclesiology in the Baptist vision. EBF General Secretary, Tony Peck, presents research and reflection upon notions of *episkopé* found within the Baptist community. There are no absolute models, as might be found within denominations where there is a strong hierarchy, but using the investigative lens of *episkopé* as defined in the World Council of Churches Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), he explores the three-fold dimension of personal, collegiate and communal which BEM proposes. His paper was prepared for the Baptist World Alliance-Roman Catholic Church annual dialogues (2006-2011) and therefore matters are often considered in relation to bilateral dialogues between various of the Christian world communions. If we assert that the Roman Catholic accent on *episkopé* is with the individual and Baptist with the community, this paper causes us to reflect that such generalisations need nuancing with how other aspects of *episkopé* are evidenced within both traditions. The paper reflects mainly on European experiences, but provides valuable treatment of this important topic.

Christopher Schelin explores community *episkopé* as experienced within the Baptist church meeting. He explores the theology of a community under the rule of Christ and how that has often become a voluntary society meeting governed by simple adversarial resolutions and voting procedures, a populist form of liberal democracy. If this travesty of theological insight is not how Baptists understand authentic decision making, must a new model be sought? He explores the insights of Romand Coles and his radical democracy theories which do have resonance with theological concerns as to how a community of believer's discerns the mind of Christ in ways which might resonate less with adversarial politics and more with the desire to build true communities of disciples.

Finally, one of the doyens of Baptist history and scholarship, Albert Wardin, provides accounts of how believer's baptism came to be implanted among evangelical Christians in the Russian Empire and thus bring into being communities of faith we now call Baptist. There was opposition from Orthodox and Lutherans and some baptisms were against the prevailing law, but we learn of the slow and steady adoption of baptism on profession of faith across the empire in a period from 1856 to 1871.

Together, these articles provide insights into Baptist identity and ecclesiology. Exploring these issues provides valuable commentary on contemporary Baptist life and experience.

Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS, Prague

Episkopé – A Baptist Perspective

Tony Peck

The original context of this paper is important. It was given at the Fourth Meeting (of five) of the official Conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church, examining various areas of difference between us from the perspective of each side, using the lenses of Scripture and Tradition.

The theme of the Fourth Meeting was oversight (episkopé) in the church. For the Baptists, there was a paper preceding this one on Baptist ecclesiology, and a paper following it on how Baptists view the episkopé of the Petrine Office (Papacy).

This paper seeks to demonstrate that the concepts of ‘apostolicity’ and ‘catholicity’, whilst not terms used very often by Baptists, do have their roots in our Baptist tradition in relation to what we believe about ministry and oversight in the church. Implicit in this paper is a desire to reach back further than a ‘voluntarist’ understanding of Baptist ecclesiology to a richer seam of Baptist thinking expressed in some of the earliest Baptist Confessions and revived today in the concern of at least some Baptists to re-emphasise the church as the covenanted community called into being by Christ and living under his rule; of episkopé being a dynamic reality centred on the local church but also embracing wider expressions of ‘church’ for Baptists; and of our understanding of ministry going beyond the merely ‘functional’ to explore its ‘length’ and ‘breadth’ in terms of apostolic continuity and also ‘catholicity’ in its connectedness to the church universal.

1. Episkopé in Three Dimensions

In recent times there has been acceptance by many Churches, expressed in the convergence document *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) and elsewhere that *episkopé* or *oversight* in the church should be thought of as having three dimensions: personal, collegial and communal. BEM invited all churches, whatever their pattern of ministry, to affirm these three dimensions:

The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can be most effectively pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should be collegial for there is a need

for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.¹

Both Baptists and Roman Catholics may well be able to affirm these three elements, without necessarily interpreting them in the way in which BEM does. For Roman Catholics, *episkopé*, in its personal dimension, primarily describes the ministry of the *episkopos* (bishop) as a symbol and focus of unity, and there is no developed sense of how a parish priest, for example, shares in this *episkopé*. Since the Second Vatican Council there has been a greater emphasis on the collegial dimension, for instance in the collegiality of bishops in Bishops' Conferences. From the perspective of a Baptist it seems as if, for Roman Catholics, the most difficult question might be about the communal dimension and how it integrates with the other two; it seems easier to speak of the *presence* of Christ in the community rather than the community's *episkopé*.² The only sense in which Roman Catholic thinking could perhaps be said to embrace communal *episkopé* would be in the process of development of doctrine in its reception and handing on by the communion of the faithful, part of the *sensus fidelium*.³ Also, the Report of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue of 1990 speaks of agreement on the 'ministry of oversight' (*episkopé*) exercised by church members for the fidelity, unity, harmony, growth and discipline of the wayfaring people of God under Christ, who is the Shepherd and Guardian of all souls (1 Peter 2:25).⁴

This latter statement perhaps provides common ground with Baptists. Baptists have also wished to affirm the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of *episkopé* but have explained them in a way in which the personal and collegial dimensions are not wholly dependent on ordained persons to exercise them, and where the whole concept is perhaps more fluid than in other Christian traditions. This is well summarised in the

¹ Report, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (hereafter BEM), pp. 25-6 (Geneva: WCC, 1982). For a Baptist discussion of these three elements, see J.F.V. Nicholson, 'Towards a Baptist Theology of Episcopé', *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol 30, 1983, pp. 265ff and 319ff.

² See D.N. Power OMI, *Mission, Ministry, Order* (New York: Continuum 2008), pp. 288-290, which discusses this paragraph in BEM and links it with other recent Catholic statements.

³ Report, *Called to be One* (Churches Together in England, 1996), p. 77, Appendix D, which deals with how the different Churches in England view ordained ministry.

⁴ Report of the Roman Catholic-World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Conversations, *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990, at www.prounione.urbe.it, accessed on 20.10.09.

recent Report of the Conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the worldwide Anglican Communion:

Baptists.... also have always recognized these three dimensions of *episkope* within and among the churches. However, in the first place the basic personal ministry of oversight is given to the minister or pastor in the *local* church, whom many Baptists called either ‘elder’ (*presbuteros*) or ‘bishop’ (*episkopos*) without distinction. Oversight in the local community flows to and fro between the personal and the communal, since the responsibility of ‘watching over’ the church belongs both to the members gathered in church meeting and to the pastor. This is grounded in the theological principle of the primary rule of *Christ* in the congregation. Baptists do, however, also recognize *episkope* at an inter-church level. Oversight is exercised communally by a regional association of churches, which in assembly seeks the mind of Christ for the life and mission of the member churches, while having no power to *impose* decisions on the local church meeting. Oversight flows freely between the communal and the personal here too, as personal oversight is exercised by various kinds of senior ministers who are linked either with the association or with the convention/union at state or national level.⁵

We might add that in this dynamic movement between the personal and the communal there is also a place for collegial *episkopé* in the form of shared ministry at local, regional and national levels.

We will first draw some of the implications of this summary statement before going on to explore a Baptist understanding of *episkopé* in relationship to both the *apostolicity* and *catholicity* of the Church.

The rule of Christ

In Baptist ecclesiology each local church understands itself to be a community called into being by Christ, living in covenant with Christ and with each other, and together living under the rule of Christ, continuing to share in his ministry as prophet, priest and king. So the Second London Particular Baptist Confession of 1677 speaks of church members as those who ‘willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ’.⁶ A more modern Baptist Statement on the Church affirms that ‘Such churches are gathered by the will of Christ and live by the indwelling of his Spirit. They do not have their origin, primarily, in human

⁵ Report of the International Conversations between The Anglican Communion and The Baptist World Alliance, *Conversations Around the World 2000-2005* (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2005), pp. 60-61.

⁶ ‘Second London Confession’ in W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1968), p. 286.

resolution.’⁷ This then is the departure point in our thinking about *episkopé*. First of all, Christ calls the church into being as its Head and creates *koinonia*. Authority in the congregation belongs to the rule of Christ and this is primarily discerned by the whole congregation gathered together in church meeting to seek the mind of Christ in prayer and scriptural reflection, and to ‘watch over’ one another. This authority or rule of Christ cannot be shared in the sense of being delegated to any human leader ‘from above’.⁸

Ministry is a shared characteristic of the whole church. The New Testament abolishes any idea of rulers and the ruled, the latter existing for the sake of the former, and replaces it with a concept that applies to all: *diakonia* or service. In the church only Jesus Christ rules.⁹

The ministry of the whole people of God

It is no doubt a point of convergence between Baptists and Roman Catholics that as BEM puts it, ‘the church as a communion of the Holy Spirit is called to proclaim and prefigure the Kingdom of God.... by announcing the gospel to the world and by being built up as the body of Christ’ and that to fulfil this calling ‘the Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts’.¹⁰ The primary function of the Church as the household of God (Eph 2:19) is to exhibit in its corporate life the true character of fellowship with God.¹¹

It is worth noting in this context that Baptists use ‘priesthood’ in two senses. First of all, it is used of Christ, our great high priest¹² at the right hand of the Father and making intercession for us; and secondly, it refers to the ‘priesthood of all believers’ by which is meant that the priesthood, with its roots in the priestly families of the Old Testament, is now generalised to all believers; ‘the church as a whole is a priesthood to God offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and service’.¹³ It is a misunderstanding of a

⁷ From ‘The Baptist Doctrine of the Church 1948’, in R. Hayden (Ed), *Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977* (London: Baptist Union of Great Britain), p. 6.

⁸ ‘Authority in Relations between Pastor and People’, Ch 5 in P.S. Fiddes: *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), p. 85ff.

⁹ N.G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 160.

¹⁰ BEM, p. 20, Section on ‘Ministry’, paras 4 and 5. This point is also specifically affirmed in the Roman Catholic Response to BEM, in Max Thurian (Ed), *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. 6, (Geneva: WCC, 1988), p. 28.

¹¹ Report, *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination among Baptists* (London: Baptist Union, Carey Kingsgate, 1957).

¹² Hebrews 7:26, 9:11.

¹³ Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 161, cf. Richard P. O’Brien, *Catholicism*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1986, p. 806, ‘...the Second Vatican Council acknowledged that all the baptised participate in some way in the one priesthood of Christ’.

Baptist concept of the priesthood of all believers’ to say that any believer is called and competent to take any role or office in the church. Rather, it refers to the calling of the people of God as a whole and for this reason Baptists have not used the term to refer to an individual called to exercise *episkopé* in the church.

Ministry of all and ministry of some

The relationship between the ministry of all and the ministry of some as one of enabling and equipping the Body of Christ as a whole finds its classic focus in Ephesians 4:11-13:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Specific forms of ministry such as those mentioned here are there to serve the body of Christ as a whole and to enable the ministry of the whole people of God. As a Baptist Statement on Ordination puts it ‘The assertion that God has brought into being the living organism of the Christian fellowship carries with it the implication that God will impart form to the organism’.¹⁴

The movement here flows from the creation of *koinonia* in the community as a whole to the need for some set aside to enable and equip the community, whose *episkopé* flows back through the community that it might discover a deeper *koinonia* and a more effective ministry to the world. The relationship is characterised by Christlike ‘servanthood’ and the offering of trust and confidence by the community to those called to a personal *episkopé* in its midst. These words from Ephesians reminds us that there is also an eschatological dimension, always drawing the community forward towards the completion of a growing into maturity and unity.

The Particular Baptist London Confession of 1644 expresses both personal and corporate *episkopé* in terms of to ‘watch over’.

And as Christ for the keeping of this Church in holy and orderly Communion placeth some special men (*sic*) over the Church who by their office are to goverene, oversee, visit, watch; so likewise for the better keeping thereof in all places, by all members he hath given authoritie, and laid dutie upon all, to watch over one another.¹⁵

¹⁴ Report, *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination among Baptists*, p. 11.

¹⁵ ‘London Confession 1644’ Clause XLIV, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 168.

So, the theological principle here is that first the church gathers in *koinonia*, and this then calls for *episkopé*. ‘There is no sense that the office of oversight, however it is expressed *creates* the unity of the church.’¹⁶

2. Apostolicity

In common with other Christian traditions, Baptists begin their understanding of ministry and *episkopé* with the way in which Jesus appointed the first apostles,¹⁷ authorising them to preach, be sent out in mission, and engage in healing and, later, the power to ‘bind and loose’.¹⁸

In these actions of Jesus we are entitled to see a pattern for the continuing work of the ascended Lord in the church, for which he perpetually provides. Christ continues to call those whom he chooses; as they respond they also are identifiably appointed within his community as those commissioned to preach, to heal and to have authority in Christ’s name over evil influences. They are sent by Christ to be received by others as Christ’s own, indeed, as Christ himself.... This is the apostolic ministry and it cannot be said to be valid only for the first generation of believers.¹⁹

We note that in the New Testament the term ‘apostle’ did not only apply to the Twelve, but also to Paul and others who in a different sense from the original apostles were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and entrusted by Christ with the Gospel.²⁰ Baptist New Testament scholar Sean Winter notes four referents of the term ‘apostle’ in the New Testament and that the source of authority for apostolic ministry changes in each one (christological, ecclesiological and the apostolic testimony itself). He says that the church’s understanding of apostleship and apostolicity has to some extent been framed by which of these models has dominated.²¹

One example of this is the controversial issue of the ordination of women to the ministry and their exercise of *episkopé* in the church. Baptists are not agreed on this, but those Baptist Unions and Conventions which do not ordain women are usually biblically conservative and base their view on certain prohibitions they find in the Pauline Epistles.²²

¹⁶ *Conversations Around the World 2000-2005*, p. 61.

¹⁷ Mark 3:19.

¹⁸ Luke 9:1-6, John 20:20-23.

¹⁹ Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 164.

²⁰ Romans 1:1, 16:7, Acts 14:14, I Thess 1:1.

²¹ The four models are: apostles as church delegates, one of the Twelve, Paul plus an open group of those called by Christ, and foundation of the church, S. Winter, ‘Translocal Ministry: New Testament Perspectives’ in S. Murray (Ed), *Translocal Ministry: Equipping the Churches for Mission* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2004).

²² e.g. I Corinthians 14: 34-35 and I Timothy 2:11ff.

Traditionally the Roman Catholic concern has been to have a faithful resonance with Christ and the first apostles on this issue, seen in terms of the maleness of Christ and that Christ only appointed male apostles, and therefore that those who stand in continuity with the first apostles must be male. So, in the words of the late Pope John Paul II, ‘the church has no authority whatever to confer priestly ordination on women’.²³

I believe that most Baptists would not take this particular view of fidelity to the apostolic witness but rather that ‘we live, and act in continuity with their unique testimony rather than in simple continuation of their office’ and that ‘the Church and its ministry are truly apostolic, not in repetition or prolongation of this unique apostolate, but in faithfulness to this unique apostolate’.²⁴ So Baptists who accept the ordination of women would see themselves being faithful to Christ and the apostolic witness and teaching as a whole.²⁵

Apostolic Succession

Therefore it is not surprising that ‘apostolic succession’ is not a term which Baptists would normally use because the phrase so often means a ‘traceable historical continuity’.²⁶ The response of the Baptist Union of Sweden to BEM that ‘the apostolic tradition has survived outside the formal succession of apostolic ministry’ and that apostolic succession ‘is no better guarantee for a living apostolic tradition than other forms of leadership’, would represent a common Baptist understanding.²⁷

Nevertheless, Baptists would affirm that ‘the church lives in continuity with the New Testament Apostles and their proclamation, and with the apostolic church. A primary manifestation of this is to be found in fidelity to the apostolic teaching, and especially the continuing preaching and teaching of it by those set aside and appointed by the church to do so; and we should note BEM’s insistence that the succession of bishops was only *one* of the ways, along with transmission of the Gospel and the life of

²³ Pope John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (Apostolic Letter) 4. In the discussion following this paper it was pointed out that the traditional arguments against the ordination of women derived from the maleness of Christ and the apostles have been in more recent years supplemented by teaching about the ‘complementarity’ of the roles of men and women (See Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 1988). This latter argument would also be used by some Baptists opposed to women pastors.

²⁴ J.E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 224-226.

²⁵ Galatians 3.28.

²⁶ See the discussion in the Report, *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity: Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), Chapter 7, p. 87ff.

²⁷ In M. Thurian (Ed), *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. 4 (Geneva: WCC, 1987).

the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church is expressed.²⁸

In its dialogue with the Church of England, British Baptists were able to agree with two points found in *The Porvoo Common Statement*,²⁹ that the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the church as a whole ‘as it participates in the ministry of Jesus and is faithful to the words and acts of Jesus transmitted by the Apostles’; and that ‘this continuity is served by the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight within the church’. Baptists expressed difficulty with the third sign, the ‘continuous ordination of bishops, to whom is committed the ordination of other ministers as a “sign” of apostolic continuity’; and they wished to add that for them ‘the continuity of faithfulness of the whole church is expressed in the assemblies of the church, at both regional and local level’.³⁰

Therefore, Baptists would see the apostolic tradition primarily as the faithful handing on of the original testimony to Jesus Christ; this continuity lies in the whole Church and in its ministry. It ‘requires at once a historical continuity with the original apostles and a contemporary and graciously renewed action of the Holy Spirit’.³¹

We would agree that the later writing of the New Testament shows that the situation of how the apostolic tradition would be continued became important when the Church passed from the first to the second generation and beyond. This is evidenced by Paul’s exhortation to Timothy that ‘what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well’.³² This speaks of both a process of ‘handing on the Gospel’ and some responsibility for teaching it. Therefore, for Baptists, ‘it is entirely correct to speak both of an apostolic tradition and an orderly transition in ministry’.³³ But as Nigel Wright goes on to explain, essentially the tradition is not safeguarded *externally* by the act of laying on of hands from one generation to another but *internally* by faithfulness to the apostolic testimony; and that testimony is the property and responsibility, not of ministers alone, but of the ‘household of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)’.³⁴

²⁸ Final Report, *Dialogue between the RC Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and Some Classic Pentecostals*, 1982, Para 88, at www.prounione.urbe.it, accessed on 20.11.09. See also BEM, p. 28.

²⁹ *The Porvoo Common Statement*, Conversations between The British and Irish Anglican Churches and The Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches (London: The Council for Christian Unity, 1992).

³⁰ *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, pp. 84-85.

³¹ *The Presence of Christ in the World*, Report of the Roman Catholic-WARC Conversations (First Series, 1977), Para. 101.

³² 2 Timothy 2:2.

³³ Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 164.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

The nature of ministry

Historically many Baptists have been able to affirm ministry as essentially the ‘ministry of Word and Sacrament’.³⁵ This is also the basis for the section on ministerial ‘order’ in the Roman Catholic-WARC Statement referred to earlier, with its affirmations that ‘ministerial order manifests itself above all in the ministry of the Word’ and ‘also finds expression in the ecclesial rites, traditionally called sacraments’.³⁶ For Baptists it is not *exclusively* the pastor of a local church who can preach and teach the Word, and celebrate baptism and the eucharist, but for most Baptists it would be a matter of good order that he/she would *normally* do so as the one exercising overall *episkopé* of the congregation, and that others who from time to time share in these ministries would be authorised to do so by the church meeting.³⁷

Patterns of Episkopé

It is clear that as the generation of the apostles died out others inherited their ministry and were *presbuteroi* (elders) or *episkopoi* (bishops), terms which seem to be used interchangeably in the New Testament, rather than two distinct offices.³⁸ And there is little evidence that in the New Testament period the responsibility or sphere of such ministry went beyond the local church.³⁹

At this point we would affirm with BEM and other Reports of dialogues, based on New Testament studies, that ‘the New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry for the church’.⁴⁰ A variety of forms of ministry exist in different places and times, though there is a general movement from the more spontaneous and ‘charismatic’ to the more ‘ordered’.

But from the beginning of their story, Baptists have taken seriously such pointers to the good ordering of the church as there are in the New Testament, without making of them a fixed pattern. The earliest Baptist

³⁵ e.g., Report, *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination among Baptists*, para 51, pp. 23-4; Report, *Forms of Ministry among Baptists: Towards an Understanding of Spiritual Leadership* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1994), p. 28ff.

³⁶ Report of the Roman Catholic-World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) Conversations, *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 1990, at www.prounione.urbe.it, accessed on 20.10.09, Paras 133-134.

³⁷ See Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, pp. 172-4 for a more extended discussion of this point. Wright contends that ordained ministry belongs to the *bene esse*. It is *almost* necessary for the *esse* of church but not quite *absolutely*.

³⁸ See Acts 20: 17 and 20 and Titus 1: 5 and 7.

³⁹ Winter, ‘Translocal Ministry: New Testament Perspectives’, p. 21.

⁴⁰ BEM, p. 24. See also Report of the Baptist World Alliance-World Alliance of Reformed Churches Dialogue, WARC, 1977, p. 25.

Confessions were based on the conviction that Christ had established certain ‘offices’ in the church, alongside the gifts of all members; and that ‘while these offices might well take different shapes in different contexts, there is an underlying *pattern of office* which can be discerned from the New Testament and from the experience of the Spirit by the Church in its life through the ages’.⁴¹

So Baptists have historically seen *episkopos* and *presbuteros* as one ‘order’ of ministry, which combined with *diakonos* has given rise to a normative twofold pattern, sometimes expressed in the language of pastor and deacons (normally ‘deacons’ are not ordained⁴² but exercise collegial *episkopé* of a local church together with the pastor). Whatever the pattern, the language is of ‘appointment’ to ‘office’ – by the call of Christ and by discernment of the local church seeking the mind of Christ:

A particular Church gathered and compleatly organised, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers, and Members; And the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the Church (so called and gathered) for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of Power, or Duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.⁴³

However, as already alluded to, in giving meaning to the elder/bishop figure, Baptists have found it helpful to use the concept of *episkopé* as expressive of the *function* of the elder/presbyter to ‘watch over’ the community of faith. In more recent writing it is this notion of *episkopé* which has proved fruitful as a contribution to the wider ecumenical discussion on ministry. There has been a concern not to be so dogmatic about continuing with a certain two-fold pattern ‘until the end of the world’! As the summary statement at the beginning of this paper affirms, in more recent Baptist reflection *episkopé* has been a much more dynamic concept, ‘flowing’ between the personal, communal and collegial. There is also a blurring of strict boundaries between e.g. *episkopoi* and *diaconoi*, for ‘all those who exercise “oversight” are of course already “servants” in the church and the world, and those who are deacons share to some extent in oversight’.⁴⁴ This reflects, to some extent, a more recent Baptist concern among some (influenced especially by the charismatic movement) that forms of ministry should flow from the giftings and calling

⁴¹ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 19.

⁴² However, in a few EBF member Unions, such as Estonia, deacons (men and women) are ordained for life by the local church, and so carry their ordination (though not necessarily their same function) with them if they move to another Estonian Baptist Church.

⁴³ ‘Second London Confession’ in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Chap. XXVI, Para. 8, p. 287.

⁴⁴ Fiddes, ‘Authority in Relations between Pastor and People’, p. 93.

which the Spirit is actually giving to the contemporary church, leading to a re-think about the nature and scope of ‘diaconal’ ministry.⁴⁵

Nevertheless it is true historically, and probably in the majority of Baptist Churches and Unions today, that Baptists have largely held to the two-fold pattern of ministry of bishops/elders/pastors and deacons. Some local churches have introduced a third group which they term ‘elders’, to serve with the pastors and the deacons, often concentrating on the spiritual, rather than the practical oversight of the church. There are other variations on this; for instance in some European Baptist Churches there is a church ‘Board’ which exercises collegial *episkopé* and a group of deacons which engages in various ‘servant’ ministries in the church.

Trans-local episkopé

Beyond the local church in regional associations or national unions *episkopé* has been exercised in all three senses: personal, collegial and communal in ministry and decision-making. There was an interesting exception to the two-fold pattern of *episkopé*, which occurred among the General (Arminian) Baptists of the seventeenth century who, for a short period, had a structure of Bishops or ‘Messengers’, (translocal figures ministering among a group of churches whose name has clear apostolic overtones) Elders or Pastors, and Deacons or Overseers of the poor.⁴⁶

Whilst the early Baptists sometimes used ‘bishop’ to describe the local pastor, in more recent years it has been used by some Baptist Unions of their national leader⁴⁷ which does not carry any notion of apostolic succession in terms of the laying on of hands but simply because they wish to use a biblical term. In the Russian Baptist Union, the regional ministers in the *oblasts* are known as ‘bishops’. Despite the General Baptist historical example above, it would probably not be right to see these inter-church or trans-local figures as constituting a third order of ministry; but rather a reproducing in the wider context of the ‘normative’ situation of *episkopé* in the local church. Sometimes regional or national leaders are able to exercise collegial *episkopé*, and in regional bodies and national unions there is usually a Council and/or Assembly which functions like the gathering of the local church; and perhaps a national Board of Elders which functions in collegial *episkopé*. In this way, whilst Baptists have hesitated to see these wider bodies beyond the local church as full expressions of

⁴⁵ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ ‘The Orthodox Creed’ 1678 of the General (Arminian) Baptists, Article XXXI in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 319.

⁴⁷ e.g. in Latvia and Moldova.

‘church’, at least some Baptists have accorded them ecclesial reality in terms of displaying some of the ‘marks’ of the church.⁴⁸

(An exceptional example is in Georgia where the Baptists are known as The Evangelical Church of Georgia, rather than a ‘Union’, and it has adopted a threefold order of ministry. The national Baptist leader is termed ‘Archbishop’, has consecrated four bishops to assist him and adopts a model of ‘bishop’ drawn from the episcopal traditions of Orthodoxy and Anglicanism).

Apostolicity and Catholicity

Paul Fiddes has helpfully pointed out that the witness of those who continued the ministry of first apostles had two basic dimensions, *length* and *breadth*:

Its length was back to the earliest days of the witness to Christ, and its breadth was being in contact with the universal church as the whole body of Christ..... So as the original apostles died away the local church needed someone to stand in the succession of the apostle as a guardian of the faith and a representative of the universal church today.⁴⁹

Having looked at the way in which Baptists have understood ‘length’ (apostolicity) we will now examine the way in which Baptists have related breadth (catholicity) to the way in which they have understood *episkopé*.

3. Catholicity

The Final Report of the 1968 Catholic-Reformed Dialogue points quite starkly to the differences between the two traditions on the question of the Catholicity of the Church:

There is a difference in the way in which each tradition approached the question of how far and in what way the existence of the community of believers and its Union in Christ and especially the celebration of the eucharist necessitates an ordained office bearer in the Church. In how far does the institutional connection with the office of Peter and the office of bishop belong to the regularly appointed ministry in the church? For Roman Catholics, connection with the Bishop of Rome plays a decisive role in the connection of Catholicity. For the Reformed, catholicity is most immediately experienced through membership in the individual community. When it comes to the relations between ministry and

⁴⁸ For a fine study of the European Baptist Federation in this regard, and the exercise of *episkopé* by its leaders, see K.G. Jones, *The European Baptist Federation: A Study in Interdependency* (Milton Keynes: Pasternoster, 2009).

⁴⁹ Fiddes, ‘Authority in Relations between Pastor and People’, p. 89.

sacrament, the Roman Catholics find that the Reformed minimise the extent to which God, in his plan for salvation, has bound himself to the Church, the ministry and the sacraments. The Reformed find that too often Roman Catholic theology minimises the church the way the ministry and the sacraments remain bound to the freedom and grace of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰

The Reformed understanding here would be similar to a Baptist one. As we have seen, for most Baptists ordained ministry belongs to the *bene esse* rather than the *esse* of the church and they have sought to balance order and freedom in their ecclesiology. But the question remains as to how the catholicity of the church is experienced ‘in the individual community’ through the exercise of *episkopé*.

In a Report to the Baptist Union of Great Britain on *Forms of Ministry among Baptists* ministers or pastors of local churches are seen as those called to exercise a general oversight related to every part of the life and work of the church community. This is what characterises the *episkopos* figure in the church and sets them apart from *diakonoi* who may have responsibility for particular areas of the church’s life. So the pastor or minister of a local church:

...will develop an overall vision of the whole Body and gifts of all its members, and is entrusted with this general oversight to enable all to grow in to the identity of Christ the Servant of humankind, and to help them make visible God’s own ministry of reconciliation in the world around them.⁵¹

In commenting on this statement Paul Fiddes adds that ‘such an overall vision and oversight is possible ... because of the perspective brought from the life of the church *universal*’.⁵² The thought here is that ministers in their theological formation have gained a vision and understanding of the faith of the whole church universal and ‘from that perspective the minister can proclaim the word of God in to the particular local situation in which the church finds itself, and can call that community to take its place in the wider mission of the church in the world today’.⁵³ So the minister, as representative of the universal church can open the horizons of the local congregation to this greater vision.⁵⁴

Baptists have been clear that they find all the distinguishing marks of ‘church’ in the gathered local community of believers. They have also

⁵⁰ Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue, *The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, 1977, Para 107, at www.prounione.urbe.it, accessed on 20.10.09.

⁵¹ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 25.

⁵² Fiddes, ‘Authority in Relations between Pastor and People’, p. 90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 30.

affirmed their place in the one holy catholic and apostolic church, part militant on earth and part triumphant in heaven. They have not always been so clear about the necessity of ‘connectedness’ of the local church to the wider visible church, whether Baptist or universal. However, the earliest Baptists were clear that one mark of the local church was that it indeed has a necessary connectedness with other Baptist churches in order to better ‘walk together’ and witness to the world. This led to the earliest ‘associations’ of Baptist churches in England.

Daniel Turner, a Particular Baptist pastor and theologian of the mid eighteenth century went even further. He clearly saw what he called ‘particular visible Gospel churches’ as part of the *visible universal* church and that therefore fellowship should be possible between different parts of it. Turner’s vision of the church universal was exceptional for its time. And it had implications for ministry in that Turner believed that a minister of a particular Gospel church was also a minister ‘of the church in general’, giving the pastor the right to ‘minister to any other church in word and sacrament’, including the authority to assist in ordinations elsewhere.⁵⁵ (In common with practice at that time, pastors were ordained by other pastors).

In more modern times Baptist writers on ecclesiology such as Ernest Payne and Robert Walton have affirmed this insight, the latter writing in 1946 that ‘a Baptist church is a local manifestation of the universal Church, and therefore, Baptist ministers are ministers of Christ’s Church.’⁵⁶

At around the same time as Turner was writing, another well-known Particular Baptist pastor and theologian, John Gill, took a quite different view believing that in ordination a pastor was only commissioned to minister in the church where he was already a member. A version of this view also appeared in the 1940s, that if a Baptist minister ceased to preside over a particular Baptist church, ‘leaving him with no church over which to preside, he would for the time being cease to be a Baptist minister’.⁵⁷

The debate about the scope of ministry and *episkopé* and whether its reference point is only the local church or the ‘church as a whole’ has continued among Baptists, and different practices of Ordination and recognition of ministry around the world reflect these differences today. Recent writing and surveys among British Baptists have found less support previously for the view that to be a Baptist minister is to exercise *episkopé* in the local church and be confined to it; and that there are more today who

⁵⁵ Turner also believed in a ‘succession’ (though not an Apostolic one!) of ministers in the church which was provided for the whole church. See P.S. Fiddes, *Daniel Turner and a Theology of the Church Universal*, Ch 7 (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ R.C. Walton, *The Gathered Community* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1946), p. 147.

⁵⁷ A. Dakin, *The Baptist View of the Church and Ministry* (London: Baptist Union, 1944), p. 45.

would argue that ministers in their *episkopé* represent the whole church of Christ and are by their formation and calling ‘the representatives in the local of the catholic church, its teaching and its sacraments. The ordained ministry on this view is universal and acts as a stewardship of the Word and Sacrament entrusted to and standing over the universal church.’⁵⁸

Most Baptists give some expression to this in their services of Ordination which include the participating in the laying on of hands by representatives of the wider Baptist structures, whether Association, Union or Convention; and, sometimes, representatives of other traditions of the wider church. Many Baptist ministers describe their ordination as being to ‘*Christian Ministry*’, signifying their understanding that they are ministers ‘of the church in general’. *Forms of Ministry among Baptists* states that ‘since ministers are guardians of the Gospel which belongs to the whole church of Christ, and since they are the representatives of the wider church in the local one, their ministry must be recognised by more than the local church’.⁵⁹

The difficulty, of course, is that their ministry may not be officially *recognised* as such by most other Christian traditions, especially (but not exclusively) those which practice apostolic succession which includes episcopal ordination.

British Baptist theologian John Colwell, in his recent exploration of sacramental theology, and desiring to embrace a vision of the church catholic in terms of the connectedness and continuity of ministry, nevertheless writes some challenging words to all our Christian traditions:

But, in our present circumstance, this claim to a literal and physical apostolic succession has a hollow ring:in our present state of visible (physical) disunity, no superintendent minister, no bishop, no metropolitan, no pope, has authority to ordain on behalf of the whole Church in its connectedness and continuity (other than with the radical sectarian assumption that defines a part as the whole and implicitly dismisses that which is other as wholly illegitimate). The question of catholicity – of accountability and connectedness to the Church in its wholeness and continuity – appears apparently irresolvable. This should be a matter of the deepest grief to any who take Christ’s prayer for the oneness of this Church with due weight and seriousness (John 17).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 166. He bases these statements partly on the writings of British Baptist theologian Neville Clark, and cites Clark’s *The Fullness of the Church of God*, ‘Theologically the minister is not essentially a congregational figure. He is the representative of the one body set within the congregation to promote its Christological ordering and its edification in love, and as such he (*sic*) is the living embodiment of catholicity’.

⁵⁹ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 43.

⁶⁰ J.E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 229. Colwell goes on to suggest that all engaged in Christian ministry, whether

The debate concerning whether or not ordained ministers are ministers ‘of the church in general’ is in turn related to the diversity among Baptists about their understanding of ordination and ministry itself. Some Baptists have a functional view of ordination to ministry; that it is primarily a recognition before God of gifts and callings already identified and confirmed by the local church, usually with representatives of the wider church present. There is then a tendency to see ministry itself in a functional way.

But as *Forms in Ministry among Baptists* states, ‘The call to be a minister is not only the call to exercise various functions but to a “way of being” or “order of life”’.⁶¹ This view is being increasingly embraced by Baptist ministers in Great Britain and elsewhere.⁶² It represents a more ‘sacramental’ understanding of ministry; and that ordination is another dynamic meeting place (like baptism) between the grace of God, the calling, gifts and response of the individual and the prayers of the church. In this it can be said that God ‘acts’ in the life of the person being ordained, though not in a classic *ex opere operato* way and not indelibly. But Baptists who base their ordination practice on the New Testament examples of laying on of hands for ministry should be able to affirm with Nigel Wright’s assertion: ‘in that the ordained person is set aside for ministry with the prayers of God’s people, those prayers must count for something.’⁶³

Writing about this ‘sacramental turn’ for some Baptists in understanding ministry, Paul Goodliff sees it as having greater coherence with the way God acts in the world as ‘mediated presence’; it restricts the individualism of much evangelical and Baptist experience, relying on the promise of God rather than the individual experience, and it ‘coheres with the expectation that God’s Spirit will be active in the experience of the believer’.⁶⁴

One form which this renewed concern for a more ‘sacramental’ understanding has taken is in the notion of ‘inclusive representation’.

Representation is an important part of the Roman Catholic understanding of the ministry of Bishops and Priests; used in a general

Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, ... ‘acknowledge the particularity of their ordination as denominationally limited and to be prepared to submit to the renewal of that ordination – if not to episcopal re-ordination – in a truly catholic context’. Though ‘theologically incoherent’ the basis for this would be that ‘ordination within this context of disunity is not universally valid’.

⁶¹ *Forms of Ministry among Baptists*, p. 31.

⁶² P. Goodliff, *Inclusive Representation Revisited: Dialogues with a Radical Baptist Theologian* (London: Spurgeons College, 2009).

⁶³ N.G. Wright, ‘Inclusive Representation: Towards a Doctrine of Christian Ministry’, *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol XXXIX, 2001, pp. 159-174.

⁶⁴ Goodliff, *Inclusive Representation Revisited*, p. 112.

sense of the ordained representing Christ in their entire pastoral ministry and in a particular sense in that they represent Christ in sacramental activity and most of all in the Eucharist.

In this Baptist use, ‘representation’ is ‘inclusive’ ‘in the sense that the ministry does not exclude the competence and the right of others to baptise, to administer communion and to preach, because it is the Church which does these things; and representational, in that they are representatives of Christ, of the wider church and of the local church to itself, which is why they do not *exclusively* administer the sacraments but they do so *consistently*’.⁶⁵

Conclusion

This brings us back to the statement at the beginning of this paper, that for Baptists *episkopé* is a dynamic concept which ‘flows’ between the personal, the collegial and the communal in the *koinonia* of the church. It has ‘length’ stretching back to the Apostolic tradition, seen in that tradition’s balance between the freedom of the Spirit and ‘good order’ in the church, interpreted flexibly since then in time and place. At least among some Baptists, it has ‘breadth’ in terms of a placing of *episkopé* in the context of the connectedness to the life and ministry of the church universal. And some recent Baptist thinking may have resulted in drawing closer to other traditions in a more ‘sacramental’ understanding that God acts in the ‘meeting place’ of Ordination and in the ‘way of being’ of the life of a minister; and that in his or her *episkopé* the minister represents Christ but in an inclusive rather than exclusive way.

Our ongoing discussions with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ should perhaps focus on whether, despite our clear differences, we can find more common ground than we might expect in our understandings of apostolicity and catholicity in relation to *episkopé*.

The Revd Tony Peck is General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation.

⁶⁵ Goodliff, *Inclusive Representation Revisited*, p. 109. He is engaging with the earlier article by Wright (cited above), ‘Inclusive Representation: Towards a Doctrine of Christian Ministry’.

‘In a Congregational Way’ The Baptist Possibility of Sacramental and Radical Democracy

Christopher Schelin

Ecclesiology, as the study of the nature and purpose of the Church, calls for reflection on the structures of discernment and decision-making that are consonant with the Church’s mission. The theory and practice of these governance structures reveal churches to be more than just communities, in a general sense, but also *political* spaces. This essay will consider the utility of ‘democracy’ as a descriptor for the means by which such spaces are constructed in the Baptist tradition. It begins with a review of Baptist ambivalence concerning democratic language. After examining the church meeting as the central political gathering, the article surveys the development of political liberalism, the nature of its assumptions, and how these have negatively impacted Baptist ecclesial life. From there the ‘democracy’ expressed by Baptists will be reconfigured theologically. Having rejected certain major liberal convictions, the theory of radical democracy – as articulated by political theorist Romand Coles – will be drawn upon for methodological insight on how ‘democracy’ can be practiced in a manner in keeping with the convictions of Baptist ecclesiology. The aim is to articulate Baptist ecclesial politics as ‘sacramental democracy’ characterised by an ethos of receptive generosity.

A Democratic Politics?

On the surface it appears obvious that Baptist churches operate as democratic bodies. Major decisions are agreed or voted upon by the entire membership after opportunity is given for open discussion. Baptist congregations elect their own pastors and deacons and appoint their lay leaders. By every legal or jurisdictional measure they operate independently of wider bodies, such as conventions and unions. New members are ‘voted in’ by congregational approval (though often as a formality) and a congregational vote can usher erring members out of fellowship (though the practice has dwindled).

Baptist historians and theologians, however, have held varied opinions on the propriety of identifying the ‘gathered church’ or ‘congregationalist’ model as ‘democracy’. Some are quite comfortable with democratic language – though they would add certain caveats. Benjamin Griffith, a pastor in the Philadelphia Baptist Association during the

eighteenth century, stated in his polity treatise that Christ had given his church the power of 'self-governance'.¹ A century later W.B. Johnson, first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, emphasised that the church is best understood as a *Christocracy*.² Nevertheless, he noted, some described the congregational polity as 'democratical'. Johnson declared that 'so far as the mode of administering the laws of Christ is regarded, this is a proper term'.³ One of the more prominent voices in the last century, Stanley Grenz, labelled Baptist church governance 'democratic congregationalism'.⁴

Other interpreters of the Baptist tradition have been less accommodating, however. Nigel Wright denies that the intention to live under the authority of Christ is properly named by a term denoting the rule of the people.⁵ Brian Haymes concurs, insisting quite plainly, 'Ours is not a democratic form of Church government'.⁶ The first and simplest rationale for this semantic rejection is that such terminology confuses the true nature of authority in the church. *Contra* W.B. Johnson's juxtaposition of concepts, the ascription of 'democracy' is perceived as diminishing the confession of Christ's sole authority over his people. No assembly of persons in the church holds authority except as it reflects the mind of its Lord.⁷

The second criticism of democratic language charges that its use imports alien modes of decision-making and discernment into the Body of Christ. The methodology modelled by the 'adversarial democracy' of secular politics⁸ has borne lamentable fruit in the form of partisanship, zero-sum contestation, and majority-minority antagonism. When applied in the churches, such democracy achieves results damaging to fellowship in Christ. Paul Fiddes rightly remarks that congregational meetings cannot practice a form of 'people power' that excludes the dissenting minority.⁹

¹ B. Griffith, *A Short Treatise Concerning the True and Orderly Gospel Church*, in Mark Dever, (Ed), *Polity* (Center for Church Reform, 2001), p. 96.

² W.B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed Through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ*, in Dever, p. 175.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 172f.

⁴ S. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation: A Guide to Baptist Belief and Practice* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985), p. 56.

⁵ N.G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 123.

⁶ B. Haymes, *A Question of Identity: Reflections on Baptist Principles and Practice* (Leeds, UK: Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1986), p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸ This phrase is taken from political scientist Anthony Black, 'Communal Democracy and its History' in *Political Studies*, Vol. 45 (1997), p. 19.

⁹ P.S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (SBHT 13; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 86.

Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder notes that such majority decisions, especially when reached too quickly, may have the effect of appearing efficient only to allow lingering internal conflict.¹⁰ Others fear that ‘democracy’ means an institutionalisation of rote business or parliamentary procedures that empty ecclesial discernment of its spiritual and moral power.¹¹

Gathering for Discernment

Regardless of the choice of terms, a healthy Baptist ecclesiology should not neglect the fact that churches are unavoidably political bodies. They are more than the incidental aggregations of believers sharing primary individual relationships with God. Yoder offers a clear description:

The Christian community, like any community held together by commitment to important values, *is* a political reality. That is, the church has the character of a *polis* (the Greek word from which we get the adjective *political*), namely, a structured social body. It has its ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks. That makes the Christian community a political entity in the simplest meaning of the term.¹²

The various Christian traditions have expressed their convictions about ecclesial politics in divergent forms of governance. Baptists, as congregationalist Christians, have made the locus of their politics the gathering of the whole community under the lordship of Christ. The specific occasion set aside for discernment and decision-making has been called the ‘church meeting’.¹³

The idea of the church meeting is rooted in the originating Baptist conviction held by John Smyth that the essence of a church, or the ‘ecclesial minimum’, is the promise of Christ to be present ‘where two or three are gathered’ in his name (Matt 18:20).¹⁴ Therefore, the church finds its legitimacy not in the presence of a bishop or other officers but in the authority of the risen Lord present and made known through the face-to-face gathering of even just a handful of believers.¹⁵ Baptists have strongly

¹⁰ J.H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992), p. 70.

¹¹ E.g., B. Haymes, et. al., *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), p. 51f.

¹² Yoder, *Body Politics*, p. 70.

¹³ Also known as, e.g., the ‘church conference’ or, particularly in the American South, the ‘business meeting’.

¹⁴ C. Freeman, ‘Where two or three are gathered: communion ecclesiology in the Free Church’, *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (Fall 2004), p. 265.

¹⁵ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 54.

emphasised that these gatherings must submit to Christ's divine prerogatives. For example, polity treatises of the eighteenth and nineteenth century often particularly stressed the image of Christ as the lawgiver whose commands may not be abrogated by the church's own decisions.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Lord and King of the Church has called his people to participate in the exercise of his government. The implementation of his authoritative will is properly achieved through the full participation of a congregation in collective decision-making and action.¹⁷ The early Baptist leader William Kiffin described the 'great truth' affirmed by the gathered churches being that 'Christ is the King of his Church; and that Christ hath given this power to his church, not to a hierarchy, neither to a national presbytery, but to a company of saints in a congregational way'.¹⁸ Therefore the church meeting is a coming together of covenanted disciples in which they are granted the privilege and responsibility of discerning limits, possibilities and disciplines in keeping with the recognised will of Christ.

The practice of the church meeting offers a claim that the church in its gathering together becomes more than the sum of its parts. The risen Lord intends for his will to be revealed when believers seek the mind of Christ together.¹⁹ Through their interaction, notes Anabaptist scholar Franklin Littell, disciples have the means of discovering something given by the Holy Spirit.²⁰ As a practice of spiritual discernment,²¹ believers are to come to the meeting not with a predetermined answer or vote but a willingness to pray, wait and listen. They should even be willing to submit to the broad consensus when it goes against their personal wishes. Benjamin Keach, one of the prominent Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century, derided any unilateral actions on the part of an individual member performed in spite of the church's will. Such actions he considered a breach of covenant and an improper arrogation of the keys of the Kingdom to the self over the community.²² Although the church

¹⁶ E.g., Griffith, *A Short Treatise*, p. 96; Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, pp. 175, 233; *A Summary of Church Discipline*, in Dever (Ed), pp. 119, 127.

¹⁷ W.B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 1993), p. 37.

¹⁸ W. Kiffin, in the preface to 'A Glimpse of Syons Glory', in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 12:63.

¹⁹ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 52.

²⁰ F. Littell, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Group Decisions', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 34, no. 2 (April 1960), p. 80.

²¹ M.B. Copenhaver, 'Who is Robert, Anyway? And Why Do We Think We Have to Follow His Rules?', *Congregations*, Vol. 33, no. 4 (Fall 2007), p. 14.

²² B. Keach, *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline display'd*, in Dever (Ed), p. 78f.

meeting is not considered an infallible or coercive magisterium, it nevertheless demonstrates a power the believer lacks in private.

The insistence on the authority of the community as the means for discerning Christ's will appear alien to many contemporary Baptists who prioritise the individual's direct access with God. They stand at the end of a now well-documented shift in Baptist identity from covenant community to radical individualism.²³ While direct causation would be difficult to prove, it is likely that a major influence for this change has been the consolidation of political liberalism as the hegemonic ideology of Western society. An examination of its development and key principles will be necessary for evaluating the validity of 'democracy' as a proper description of governance by means of the church meeting.

The Rise and Consequences of Political Liberalism

Political liberalism grew out of the soil of the High Middle Ages. The 'Carolingian arrangement' in which the powers of temporal and spiritual rulers were joined together, and the spiritual held superiority, unravelled under the difficulty of defining the boundary between the jurisdictions of king and bishop. The emergent temporal authority of the king began accumulating power, leading eventually to the creation of the 'state'. In contrast to the overlapping loyalties and fuzzy borders of the medieval period, this new entity asserted itself as a centralised political form exercising sovereignty over a territorially-bound area.²⁴

The first modern political philosophers realised that this new unitary power arrangement required clearly formulated rationales for the basis of its sovereignty and the location of sovereignty's limits. The state needed to claim legitimate authority and not just coercive force. Thus Thomas Hobbes, with his work *Leviathan* (1651), inaugurated the political liberal tradition by positing the first ever social contract theory. Human

²³ Cf. M. Broadway, 'The Roots of Baptists in Community', in P.E. Thompson and A.R. Cross (Eds), *Recycling the Past or Researching History: Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths* (SBHT 11; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), *passim*; C. Freeman, 'Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997), *passim*; W. Hudson, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979). This shift is well-documented for Baptists in North America and the United Kingdom. The author does not presume to make claims about changes in Baptist self-understanding globally.

²⁴ The preceding is summarised from the accounts in B. Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?: A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), p. 107ff, and W.T. Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is Not the Keeper of the Common Good', *Modern Theology*, Vol. 20, no. 2 (April 2004), pp. 245-257. Cf. J.R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), *passim*.

individuals in the 'state of nature' compete in a violent struggle for resources until they agree to surrender their natural rights to a sovereign. Although Hobbes' defence of absolutist monarchy does not continue in liberal thought, his work establishes two sustained principles: legitimacy based on consent of the governed and the primacy of the 'individual' as the primary actor and bearer of rights.²⁵

It was Hobbes' near-contemporary, John Locke, who completed the basic framework for liberalism, particularly in English-speaking countries, to this very day. Locke assumed a much more peaceful state of nature than Hobbes, permeated by a 'Law of Nature' that rational individuals would normally perceive and follow.²⁶ However, irrational actors and disputes between parties result in the state of nature being abandoned for government, which, while formed to protect rights, must be strictly limited so as not to violate individual rights in turn.²⁷

Political liberalism did not logically entail democratic governance at first. But liberalism and democracy have since been united, together with capitalism (itself a liberal product), to form the sociopolitical consensus of today's Western nation-states. As a consequence, the majority of Baptists have lived, prayed and worshipped in societies in the process of becoming, or long since established as, liberal democracies. This is significant for two reasons. First, Baptists have been shaped as persons and as communities by the ubiquity of liberal-democratic assumptions. Baptists view themselves, their churches, and the meaning of participation by the former in the latter through an inherited, non-biblical lens. Second, the application of democratic grammar will undoubtedly mean the importation of liberalism's pervasive assumptions. As the aforementioned critics of 'democracy' in the church warn, this unreflective adoption violates the biblical mandate for Christian life together.²⁸

²⁵ Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company', p. 252. Cf. Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity From Itself* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), p. 40ff.

²⁶ Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*, p. 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42ff.

²⁸ Early readers of this article have remarked that I cannot speak univocally of Baptists across the globe as practising church in societies dominated by liberalism. So again I reiterate my intention *not* to speak about Baptists univocally. Rather, my general statements reflect the reality that the vast majority of Baptists *are* citizens of such societies, with three-quarters of all the Baptists in the world residing in just one particular country, the United States. This disproportionately-large Baptist community also continues to influence other Baptists through extensive funding, missionary endeavours, and theological literature or other religious media. British Baptists have been similarly affected by political liberalism and, despite their comparatively small numbers, have arguably been very influential in the global Baptist community as well.

Thus it is necessary to review key principles and products of political liberalism that negatively impact Baptist ecclesial politics. As stated above, one prime feature of liberalism is its inherent individualism. Baptists have sometimes prided themselves on practising an individualistic form of Christianity.²⁹ But the central thrust of this claim is the historic Baptist resistance to coercive practices as part of the church's life and mission and the correlative insistence on voluntary affirmation of faith and genuine commitment to discipleship.³⁰ Liberal individualism, on the other hand, is an alternative anthropology that displaces personhood-in-relationship within the Body of Christ with the so-called 'natural' perspective of the person as distinctive agent in pursuit of self-derived ends.³¹ The chief goal of society becomes the assurance of individual freedom.³² The end result, however, has been an expressive individualism that has generated profound social alienation.³³ As an element of cultural inheritance, this individualism has worked its way into Baptist life and thought such that 'religion' is primarily a matter between 'the soul and its God'. The church becomes a derivative and unnecessary addition to a believer's spiritual *experience* rather than the critical political ground for discernment, obedience to Christ's will, and consequent *discipleship*.

The second major tenet of liberalism is its goal and claim of establishing a neutral political space that neither favours any particular group, nor promotes any particular way of life, nor enforces any particular religious or philosophical beliefs.³⁴ Recognising the heterogeneous mix of claims and desires within society, the state refuses to pursue a singular social and ethical vision – the 'common good'. Nevertheless, political discourse requires some basic framework for discussion and negotiation between the competing visions in existence. So political liberalism tries to establish a 'public reason' that offers guiding principles for rational persons to debate under agreed limits.³⁵

The conception of democracy absent of a shared idea of a good, when applied to the political practice of Baptist churches, undermines the

²⁹ Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*, p. 24.

³⁰ Broadway, 'The Roots of Baptists in Community', pp. 68-73.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70; Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company', p. 254.

³² Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*, p. 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 91ff, 113. For extended arguments about these consequences in my own American context, cf. R.N. Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); R.B. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

³⁴ Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*, p. 33.

³⁵ R. Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 1, 8-10; Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company', p. 255.

very idea of Church as gathered by God for a common confession of faith and mission in the world. Baptist churches affirm a common good, the Kingdom of God under the will of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, in their corporate worship and, most especially, when they choose to pronounce their shared pursuit of the good in church covenant. To deny that common good is to further reinforce individualism and reduce church to a collection of monads expressing their personal spiritualities in a public, but not communal, space. Yet even if members of a Baptist congregation may explicitly affirm the common good in covenant and confession, they still implicitly deny it when congregational discernment is characterised primarily by majority-rules voting. This atrophied version of 'discernment' assumes a disbelief in shared values and vision.

Finally, liberalism's understanding of the political order is ironically statist in spite of its explication of constitutionally-restricted government.³⁶ As outlined above, liberalism emerged after the creation of the sovereign state in place of a decentralised patchwork of authorities. This context, reinforced by liberalism's mythology about the European 'wars of religions',³⁷ has resulted in the assumption that ultimate loyalty lies with the state as the legitimate keeper of peace and order that may call for sacrifice on its behalf.³⁸ The enlargement of state power over time has resulted in the withering away of intermediate civil associations and traditional forms of community.³⁹ The inevitable consequence for Baptist churches is that they are now cast as 'voluntary association' secondary to the 'natural' condition of state citizenship.⁴⁰ Baptists living in liberal-democratic societies are therefore socialised into a political imagination that surrenders the church's claim of heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20). The witness to an alternate political order reduces to a summons to individual salvation safely consistent with the state system. This surrender of the church's discipline is the inversion of one nineteenth-century pastor's declaration that human longing for a noble political order has indeed been found, but not in liberal democracy. 'Under the dominion of the Redeemer', he writes, 'these hopes have been fulfilled, these expectations are realized.'⁴¹

³⁶ Black, 'Communal Democracy and its History', p. 5.

³⁷ A central point in the argument by Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State", *Modern Theology*, Vol. 11, no. 4 (October 1995), *passim*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 397; Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company', p. 266.

³⁹ Cavanaugh, 'Killing for the Telephone Company', pp. 255-264.

⁴⁰ Broadway, 'The Roots of Baptists in Community', p. 71ff.

⁴¹ J.L. Reynolds, *Church Polity: Or the Kingdom of Christ, in its Internal and External Development*, in Dever (Ed), p. 304.

Rethinking 'Democracy'

When most speakers name the idea of 'democracy' they are referring to a framework defined by political liberalism. Given the pitfalls that have been identified, the use of democracy as a descriptor for ecclesial politics is unavoidably circumspect. However, the possibility remains for releasing democracy from its liberal moorings. The first move is to remember that the two traditions, while bound together in the practice of Western nation-states, are not inextricably linked. Democracy has been practised apart from, and chronologically prior to, liberal assumptions. Antony Black writes about the practice of democracy in the territorial communes of medieval Europe, explicitly contrasting communalism with individualist liberalism. He notes that the communes, typically villages or small towns, made decisions on the basis of consensus between their members.⁴² These communes ascribed political power to the entire group and constituted themselves by a collective oath.⁴³ Black concludes that the 'libertarian version of democracy...has no claim in history or experience to be the *essential* version of democracy'.⁴⁴

But even if 'democracy' is tuned again to communal and consensual process, can it be a valid self-understanding for the church meeting? Such an ascription could endanger a proper theocentric perception by habituating churches into the notion of self-rule. On the other hand, the claim to be 'Christocratic' says everything and nothing at once. All Christian communities, whatever their structures of governance, would identify themselves as 'Christocratic' and not otherwise! Both the phrase 'church freedom'⁴⁵ and the term 'congregationalism' are too broad, given that their aim is to distinguish the 'bottom-up' Baptist ecclesiology from connectional and hierarchical structures. 'Congregationalism' includes concepts of authority as resting on the church as a whole or on ruling elders.⁴⁶ Finally, neither descriptor, unlike 'Christocratic', brings to the fore the reality of God's guidance of the church.

But perhaps 'democracy' can inhere within God's desires for the community called out of darkness and into light. The will of God leaves room for sanctified human creativity made possible by covenanted participation in the life of the Trinity. Paul Fiddes writes:

⁴² Black, 'Communal Democracy and its History', p. 5ff.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 20. The point is reinforced when one examines the world's original democracy, ancient Athens.

⁴⁵ Walter Shurden's ascription.

⁴⁶ Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation*, p. 56.

There are in God movements of giving and receiving which are like the sending out of a child on mission by a parent, like the responding of a child to a parent in obedience and joy, and like the opening up of this relationship to new depths of love and a surprising future.⁴⁷

The church in Jerusalem pointed to this interactive relationship of divine and human desire when it told the Gentile congregations, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...' (Acts 15:28). As Baptist writers on church polity have declared, the lordship of Christ does not treat disciples as 'mere machines';⁴⁸ rather, the structure of the church reveals God's gracious confidence that our decisions can be faithful.⁴⁹ There is space for freedom of action even as God remains the ultimate authority.⁵⁰ At times congregational discernment may embrace a specific conviction granted by the Holy Spirit and at other times it may choose a direction that is faithful yet undetermined. In either situation the process, undertaken with the goal of consensus among the whole people bringing their giftedness to the gathering, may justly be described as 'democratic'.

Holding tightly to the promises made in Matthew 16 and 18, Baptists have at the least implied that their actions could be manifestations of God's actions as well. The church meeting assumes that God chooses to work 'in, with and under' human performance to manifest grace and achieve divine purposes.⁵¹ In other words, the church gathers not just as a *political* community but as a *sacramental* community. The church meeting, like the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, is a sign through and in which God freely accomplishes what is signified – namely, the authority of Christ as risen Lord over his people.⁵² Dedicated as a holy activity, then, congregational discernment and decision-making is taken up by the Spirit and transformed into something greater than it can be as simply a human process. Through submission, attentiveness, and obedience, congregational politics becomes what may be called *sacramental democracy*. Under this description, the character of the church meeting as a reciprocal (however unequal) divine-human encounter of relationship is upheld. The church gathers to listen and so seeks to be faithful to her Lord; however, the church also gathers to decide and act upon the trust that has been given to her.

⁴⁷ Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *The Gospel Developed Through the Government*, p. 235.

⁴⁹ Reynolds, *Church Polity*, p. 328.

⁵⁰ Haymes, et. al., *On being the Church*, p. 47.

⁵¹ This prepositional triad is taken from Yoder, *Body Politics*, p. 1.

⁵² For this definition of sacrament see John Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 11.

A New Democratic Method

Yet, given the current hegemony of liberalism, a different political grammar is necessary to narrate the practices that cohere with a democracy that is sacramental instead of individualistic. As the churches preach the bearing of one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and that each of us share our gifts for the edification of the whole (1 Corinthians 14:26), how may we do so in fidelity to Christocratic congregationalism without being co-opted by liberalism?

One answer may lie in appropriating relevant insight from alternative proposals for democratic practice. In fact, there is already an emerging theoretical stream that has tentatively engaged, and been engaged by, Christian theologians. This new tradition, known as 'radical democracy', began in 1985 with the publication of *Hegemony and Social Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Interaction between radical democracy and (b)aptist theology began when political theorist Romand Coles encountered the writings of John Howard Yoder on dialogical ethics in the church. Since then a handful of articles have suggested similarities between radical democracy and the actions of Baptists in specific contexts.⁵³ Meanwhile, a personal dialogue between Coles and Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas resulted in a co-authored book. It is Coles' articulation of radical democracy that will now be examined.

Radical democracy may be understood as a distinctive ethos of attentiveness to difference.⁵⁴ Drawing upon Continental postmodern philosophy, radical democrats give primary attention to the concept of engagement with those who are 'Other'. The practice of this sort of democracy requires dialectical tending to common goods and differences across personal, social and political barriers.⁵⁵ William Connolly has described this strategy as 'care for the rich diversity of life'.⁵⁶ Coles summarises radical democracy as a practice of receptive generosity in

⁵³ C. Freeman, 'Roger Williams, American Democracy, and the Baptists', *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 3 (Fall 2007), p. 284ff; B.W. Boswell, 'Liturgy and Revolution, Part II: Radical Christianity, Radical Democracy, and Revolution in Georgia', *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (August 2007), *passim*.

⁵⁴ D.R. Howarth, 'Ethos, Agonism and Populism: William Connolly and the Case for Radical Democracy', *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (May 2008), p. 174; Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, x, xxii.

⁵⁵ S. Hauerwas and R. Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 3, n. 4.

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Howarth, 'Ethos, Agonism and Populism', p. 175.

which individuals and groups remain open and vulnerable to the claims of others even as they generate tension.⁵⁷

Coles criticises political liberalism for being disengaged from the realities of heterogeneity and conflict as it pursues 'public reason'. While perhaps claiming its own receptive generosity under the principle of neutrality, liberalism operates under an unacknowledged historical finitude that marginalises important, questioning voices.⁵⁸ By contrast, Coles advocates openness to contestation in which porous boundaries are transgressed and reset by dialogical vulnerability. Radical democracy must even be 'endlessly agonistic in relation to itself'.⁵⁹ But the *telos* of this openness remains the possibility of progress; the struggle 'with others toward visions of what might be better'.⁶⁰

Radical democracy also refuses to valorise the state. Much of the emphasis in Coles' writings falls upon face-to-face, embodied, relational encounters. His exemplars of genuine democratic practice are primarily American grassroots organising efforts, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation⁶¹ and the early years of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, a civil rights group.⁶² Hauerwas notes that while Coles doesn't assume radical democracy can only be local, it is local politics that provides the 'crucial learning ground' for political work on all scales.⁶³ The practice of democracy depends upon genuine encounter in immediate contexts of discussion, struggle and decision.

This survey of the radical-democratic ethos reveals similarities with ecclesiology and the Baptist tradition in particular. The church itself is a heterogeneous body and has been so since the day of Pentecost. Attention to difference is a necessity in light of the church's character as a great multitude 'from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages' (Revelation 7:9) whose diversity of cultures generates tensional encounters as believers gather together (Galatians 2:11-14). Heterogeneity is also a consequence of the Spirit granting a plurality of gifts with the intention that they be offered together for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Receptive generosity must be a fundamental attitude for the sake of hearing what Christ has to say to the church when it seeks to discern his

⁵⁷ Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, xiii, xxiii, xxx; Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p. 277.

⁵⁸ Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, pp. 1-31.

⁵⁹ Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p. 171.

⁶⁰ Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, xxx.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215ff.

⁶² Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p. 61ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

will. When Coles writes that a ‘discerning’ political body gathers ‘around the possibilities and challenges of specific situations...and exercises political judgment and action in efforts to nurture life’,⁶⁴ he could just as well be writing about the church meeting in its essential character. The faithful practice of the meeting means giving space for the dissenting voice and a willingness to wait patiently for the Spirit to speak a genuine word through prayer and dialogue.⁶⁵ When Baptist churches intentionally construe their discernment as receptive generosity they may then learn to avoid the unity-destroying dangers of simplified majority voting.

Baptists have also, at their best, practised an attitude of openness that has given them flexibility to answer the call of the Spirit in new contexts. When John Smyth’s not-quite Baptist congregation declared its covenant in 1606, the people affirmed to walk together in ways known ‘or to be made known’ to them.⁶⁶ The 1644 London Confession offered the humble conclusion that ‘we confesse that we know but in part, and that we are ignorant of many things which we desire and seek to know’.⁶⁷ While this openness to the future has sometimes carried the cost of betrayal to the past, it has also been a source of renewing vitality.

Finally, little needs to be said about the shared emphasis on the local. Radical democracy practises politics ‘from the ground up’⁶⁸ just as Baptists practice their ecclesiology. For Coles, democracy’s hope lies in receptive relationships, beginning with face-to-face meetings, that cross barriers and build coalitional power.⁶⁹ For Baptists, the hope of discipleship lies in coming together as churches in which believers are not strangers but are families of care and compassion.

In a chapter discussing the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Coles draws from their experience three political practices or ‘arts’ for democracy. These practices can also be adopted by Baptist churches as helpful methods for living a sacramental democracy that sees the mind of Christ mediated in embodied encounters between disciples. The first practice is that of emphasising *listening* over ‘voice’. While proponents of democracy employ the metaphor of ‘voice’ to describe empowerment and political transformation (i.e., vote so your ‘voice’ will be heard), IAF articulates a vision of patient listening, dominated by the use of questions,

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 152.

⁶⁵ Haymes, et. al., *On Being the Church*, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Qtd. in Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Haymes, et. al., *On Being the Church*, p. 50.

⁶⁸ Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p. 161.

⁶⁹ Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, xxix.

so that persons may learn each other's stories.⁷⁰ Spiritually aware church meetings must also emphasise patient listening to ensure genuine communal discernment in place of a collectivity of expressive individuals giving 'voice'.

The second practice is *travelling*, which for IAF literally means travelling between different spaces where participants work and live in order to be transfigured by the encounter with new contexts.⁷¹ In a similar manner, Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson recommend small fellowship groups in members' homes as potential locations for face-to-face discussion.⁷² If the corporate life of the church intentionally transgresses the boundaries of the meeting house for discipleship gatherings in the diversity of members' homes and communities then it may open new possibilities of understanding and imagination.

The third practice is *tabling*, in which people gather around the metaphorical 'tables' presided over by a particular individual or group.⁷³ Much political activism centres on bringing new elements 'to the table', that is, to the established arrangements and structures of power in societies. Tabling means re-orienting power dynamics so that those who may be marginal in one setting become central figures in another. In church meetings, the 'table' may be the framework in which the pastor moderates discussion and various committees bring reports for consideration. Tabling in the context of Baptist churches could entail offering leadership to individuals and fellowships who, exercising the gifts bestowed on them by the Spirit, present a distinctive vision or a novel action. So, for example, a church member with a vision for a new ministry, instead of consulting with the pastor, deacons, or some committee that will then formulate a proposal, may be granted opportunity to moderate a church meeting herself with the goal of eliciting discussion and discernment about the church's mission.

Conclusion

The method of Baptist congregationalism is democratic but not properly in the form espoused by liberalism. Centred on the promises of Christ rather than the presuppositions of the Enlightenment, this version of ecclesial politics testifies to a sacramental experience in which the gathered community is empowered by the Holy Spirit to discern the will of Christ

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 217-222.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷² N.H. Maring and W.S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press, 1991), p. 59.

⁷³ Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, pp. 228-233.

within their context. Sacramental democracy shares certain affinities with the radical democracy of Romand Coles, whose insights on receptive generosity and its enabling arts may constructively inform the practice of the church meeting. The renewal of these convictions offer the hope that Baptist churches may be a sign and witness of what God accomplishes when his free people gather in the belief that, as they listen to one another, they will hear the Spirit speak afresh.

Christopher Schelin is a doctoral student at IBTS.

Baptist Immersions in the Russian Empire: Difficult Beginnings

Albert W Wardin, Jr

The initiation of believer's baptism by immersion throughout the Russian Empire was a defining event in the Baptist movement in the country. This action, which helped to define Baptists themselves, indicated the progress and penetration of the movement itself.

In the introduction of believer's baptism, Baptists, as elsewhere, frequently found resistance if not condemnation. In Russia the opposition was particularly fierce from both German Lutherans and Russian Orthodox. They regarded Baptists as a sect, the intrusion of an aggressive religious body. In turn, Baptists attacked as unbiblical the sacramentalism and infant baptism of these bodies.

It was almost impossible for foreign missionaries to stay any length of time in Russia and they were generally expelled if discovered. Baptist penetration was largely due to evangelical groups already in Russia who looked to Baptists for theological and ecclesiological assistance. Baptists arrived at the right time and were at the right place to take advantage of the growing indigenous stundist movement, which numbered adherents among both German and Slavic peoples. Stundists (from *Stunde*, in German), cultivated the inner religious life in their hours of prayer and Bible reading. Some who followed stundist principles, and at first knew nothing of Baptists, became Baptist leaders. These included such Germans as Gottfried Alf in Russian Poland and Johann Pritzkau in Ukraine, and Ukrainians such as Ivan G. Ryaboshapka and Mikhail T. Ratushnyi.¹

Although some stundists accepted Baptist principles, including believer's baptism by immersion, many did not and even resisted it. German stundists, by and large, remained with their Lutheran and Reformed congregations and continued to practice infant baptism. Even among Russian and Ukrainian stundists who had rejected the sacraments of the Orthodox Church, numbers of them rejected believer's baptism and some continued to practice infant baptism. The Mladostundists (young Stundists), favouring simple devotional meetings, rejected the organisational centralisation of Baptist ecclesiology. They spiritualised baptism, regarding it as unnecessary as they practised the sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Many Pashkovtes, evangelicals in St Petersburg, not

¹ For the indigenous characteristics of the Baptist movement in the Russian Empire, see A.W. Wardin, Jr., 'How Indigenous was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire?', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. nine, No. 2 (Jan. 2009), pp. 29-37.

only felt it unnecessary to withdraw formally from the Orthodox Church, but also, having been baptised as infants, did not find it incumbent to be immersed as believers.

It was thus no easy task to introduce believer's baptism by immersion into the Russian Empire. When it did arrive, it took many years for it to become established, progressing from group to group and from area to area. The first believer's baptism by immersion occurred among Swedes in the Åland Islands (1856), then among Germans in Russian Poland (1858), Mennonite Brethren in Ukraine (1860), Latvians in the Baltic (1861), Germans in Ukraine and in St Petersburg (1864), Great Russians in the Caucasus (1867), and Ukrainians in Ukraine (1869-1871). Each introduction has its own special story, but this article will highlight only three of them, describing the uniqueness of each.

Mennonite Brethren in the Ukraine

The Mennonite Brethren, closely aligned with German Baptists in faith and polity, played an important role in establishing believer's baptism by immersion among the German population of the Empire. This body was a revivalist movement. It separated itself from other Mennonites by establishing congregations of regenerate members over against including members who had traditionally grown up in the faith. With their Anabaptist antecedents, Mennonites rejected infant baptism and practised baptism by sprinkling or pouring of those who accepted the faith. For Mennonite Brethren, however, candidates for baptism were to give a creditable confession of faith and evidence of regeneration.

It was not long after their establishment in 1860 that Mennonite Brethren began to practice believer's baptism by immersion. Mennonite Brethren authors acknowledged a strong Baptist influence for immersion in Chortitza, an older Mennonite colony, but had tended to ignore it in Molochna, a younger colony, where such baptism was first practised.²

From the manuscript of Jacob P. Bekker and the history of Mennonites in Russia by Peter M. Friesen, there is a clear Baptist source. In Molochna, Jacob Bekker and Henry Bartel immersed each other on 23rd September 1860 (o.s.), thus initiating the practice. Before the baptism, John Claassen, who had recently returned from St Petersburg where he represented Mennonite Brethren interests, asked Bekker, 'If you are going to baptize, who are you going to get to do it?'. Claassen had brought with

² See Wardin, 'Baptist influences on Mennonite Brethren with an Emphasis on the Practice of Immersion', *Direction*, VIII/4 (Oct. 1979), for a discussion of Mennonite Brethren views on Baptist influence in instituting immersion.

him a Baptist tract, obtaining it almost certainly from Ch. Plonus, whom he knew personally. Plonus was a Baptist layman who had settled in St Petersburg in 1855 and had formed a religious fellowship and was a distributor of tracts.³

In his correspondence with Mennonites, Gottfried Alf, the German Baptist leader in Russian Poland, raised the question of the proper method of immersion. Alf was critical of Mennonites who immersed candidates who first knelt in the water and were immersed face forward. Alf insisted that the one proper method, practised by Baptists everywhere, was the lowering of the candidate backwards into the water. This also became the universal method for Mennonite Brethren.⁴

Mennonite Brethren spread the practice of believer's baptism by immersion by not only gaining additional Mennonites to their own ranks but, in 1864, by baptising German believers in the non-Mennonite settlements of Neu-Danzig and Alt-Danzig. Upon the expulsion of those immersed in the former colony to Dobrudja in the Balkans (then part of Turkey), an important German Baptist congregation arose here. Also in the latter settlement, a German Baptist congregation arose that in time had a great influence on neighbouring Ukrainians.

However, because of their Mennonite culture and closed communities, Mennonite Brethren were generally unable, in the nineteenth century, to reach beyond Mennonite communities. Gerhard Wieler, who immersed a few Ukrainians in the 1860s, was imprisoned and finally left the country. But it was another Mennonite Brethren, Abraham Unger, who helped to initiate the first Ukrainian immersions.

Germans and Russians in the Caucasus

A unique set of circumstances led, in 1867, to the immersion of the first Great Russian. The three main characters, an unlikely trio in this drama, were Martin K. Kalweit, a German Baptist of Lithuanian extraction who was born in the Province of Kovno in western Russia; Yakob D. Delyakov (Dilakoff), an evangelical Nestorian, born in Persia; and Nikita I. Voronin, a Great Russian who was born a Molokan in the Caucasus.

Historians have not generally utilised or known about certain primary sources related to these three men. One is a letter in German from

³ J.P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS.: The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), pp. 179-181. P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, CA.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 287-88, 345, 359, 370. Otto Ekelmann, *Gnadenwunder* (Memel: Author, 1928), pp. 86-87.

⁴ Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, pp. 285-86, 288.

Martin Kalweit, written for him by his brother Karl, a letter translated into English for the Baptist press. Another is the autobiography of Delyakov, written in Farsi (or Persian) but translated in the 1930s by Presbyterian missionaries. A third is a letter in Russian from Voronin and his wife Ekaterina. An additional source is a letter in Russian from Karl Kalweit.⁵

Martin Kalweit was baptised in East Prussia, Germany, near the Russian border. While living at a mill he met and married Carolina Val, the Miller's daughter. For economic reasons, Kalweit, with his wife, two sisters, and relatives of his wife, a total of twelve, left for the Caucasus, 1,800 miles away, where Kalweit's uncle and brother Karl lived. After 600 miles, the relatives of Kalweit's wife decided to stay in Odessa. But Kalweit, his wife, and sisters, with the financial assistance of fifty rubles from fellow Baptists in Odessa, continued to the Caucasus. Here Kalweit's prosperous relatives received them poorly, even charging them for accommodation. Kalweit and his family then settled in Tiflis but felt isolated and even feared the Russian people. Nevertheless, they held religious services for themselves and sang songs in German and Russian. However, Kalweit's attempts at mission work in the military barracks among Latvians and Finns met with failure.

In his letter in July 1869 to Johann Oncken in Hamburg, Germany, Kalweit told of his trip and life in the Caucasus and that his little group had grown to eleven with the recent baptism of two Germans, a youth and a man of middle age. A short time later on 6th October 1869 (o.s.) he baptised, at eleven o'clock at night in the Kura River, his brother Karl and Johann (Ivan) Kargel. Kargel was a young man of twenty, recently converted, part German and Armenian, and a Turkish subject. In time he played a leading role among Baptists and Evangelical Christians as a preacher, missionary and noted theologian.

Kalweit's letter, however, did not tell of his baptism two years earlier on 20th August 1867 (o.s.) of Nikita I. Voronin, also at night in the Kura River. The baptism almost did not occur. Yakob D. Delyakov, the Nestorian evangelical, was working among the Molokans, a dissident sect

⁵ For Martin Kalweit's letter, see *Missionsblatt*, Dec. 1869, pp. 129-132, and *Baptists Missionary Magazine*, Jan., 1870, pp. 19-21. Delyakov's autobiography in Farsi under the name of Qasha Yakob Dilakoff is in *Three Missionary Heroes* (Urmia, Persia: Press of the American Presbyterians, 1904), pp. 213-272. In English, see 'The Autobiography of Jacob Dilakoff, Independent Missionary in Russia', translated by Benjamin Labaree and Mary Lewis Shedd in instalments in *European Harvest Field*, XVI (1935), March-June, Sep.-Dec. For Voronin, see his letter to A.M. Mazaev, 15th March, 1889, in Viktor L. Val'kevich, *Zapiska o propaganda protestantskikh 'sekt' v' Rossii i. v' osobennosti, na Kavkaze* (Tiflis 1900), Appendix 5, pp. 27-28. For Karl Kalweit, see his letter to A. M. Mazaev, 17th June 1889, Val'kevich, Appendix 5, pp. 29-30.

from the Orthodox Church, and had met Voronin, a Molokan merchant. The Molokans rejected the rites and sacraments of the Orthodox Church, including the rite of baptism, and lacked a full Christology, rejected justification by faith, and a disciplined membership.⁶

Voronin requested Delyakov, although baptised only as an infant, to immerse him, but Delyakov refused. He feared such an act would terminate his work among the Molokans who would resent the baptism. Delyakov then suggested that Kalweit might baptise him since Kalweit, with his family, were the only evangelicals he knew. At first Voronin refused. With his Molokan antecedents, he and other Molokans, influenced by the Jewish law, did not eat pork, and since Kalweit, as a German, ate pork he would be unacceptable. Nevertheless, Delyakov persuaded Voronin to change his mind. Delyakov, who served as interpreter, and Voronin went to the tinsmith shop of Kalweit, where Kalweit agreed most happily to perform the rite. Kalweit, his wife, and Delyakov examined Voronin as to his faith, prayed, and then went to the Kura River where Kalweit baptised Voronin, the first native Russian.

In the following year, Kalweit baptised Voronin's wife, Ekaterina. In 1869 Voronin himself baptised two Molokan couples, forming, on 18th April, his own Russian Baptist congregation of six members. Voronin continued to gain other Molokans, including, in 1871, two young men, Vasiliï Pavlov and Vasiliï V. Ivanov. Both became leading Baptist pastors and evangelists. For a time the German congregation of Kalweit existed alongside the Russian congregation of Voronin but in the early 1870s the Kalweit group merged with Voronin's group.

Vasiliï Ivanov, who was partial to Molokan antecedents and resisted Germanic influences, wrote an article in 1908 in the Russian periodical *Baptist* rejecting the idea that German Baptists brought the Baptist movement to Russia.⁷ He pointed out that the movement already had roots in the 1840s and 1850s among the Water Molokans who broke with other Molokans in accepting baptism and the Lord's Supper. But Ivanov's contention that Voronin had become 'enamored' with the teaching of the Water Molokans, which prepared him to accept believer's baptism, is, however, overstated. In his 1889 letter, Voronin wrote that four years before 1867 he had met with Water Molokans who directed his attention to the need of baptism. But Voronin also stated that he went on a spiritual quest and after meeting Delyakov experienced salvation by faith. This

⁶ For a short survey of Molokan beliefs, see Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), pp 105-12. Also see Hans-Christian Diedrich, *Urpünge und Anfänge des russischen Freikirchentums* (Erlangen, 1985), pp. 131-36.

⁷ V.V. Ivanov, 'Kniga episkopa Aleksiya', *Baptist*, Sep. 1908, pp. 23-27.

experience helps to explain why Voronin never sought baptism from the Water Molokans and struck out on his own path apart from them. In spite of cultural and theological obstacles, the first Russian Baptist was finally baptised.

Germans and Ukrainians in Ukraine

One of the most significant baptisms in Russian Baptist history occurred in 1869 in the German colony of Alt-Danzig. Although the candidates were almost entirely German, it set off a chain of baptisms that widely spread among the Ukrainian population. The baptism itself is somewhat problematical – was it planned or accidental?

For some years Ephraim Prizkau and his son, Johann, held devotional meetings in their home in Alt-Danzig attended by both Germans and Ukrainians. In 1869 a great revival movement occurred in the area among both Germans and Ukrainians. Johann, who had been in Hamburg for fourteen months for theological instruction, returned in the midst of the revival before Pentecost and participated in it.⁸

A baptism was planned for 11th June 1869 (o.s.), the second day of Pentecost. Although Johann, who had just been ordained in April for mission service, could baptise, Abraham Unger, the Mennonite Brethren pastor from Chortitza and closely aligned with Baptists, was invited to perform the baptism. The examination of candidates took some days. A crowd of both Germans and Ukrainians gathered to observe. Unger first read Scripture, sang with the assembled group, prayed, and then took separately each candidate, clothed in white linen, into the water. After prayer Unger immersed the candidate. Contrary to Russian law, however, two candidates were Ukrainian, born into the Orthodox faith - Efim Tsimbal, a Ukrainian man, and a Ukrainian girl reared in a German home.⁹

In his first account of the baptism, Pritzkau reported a ‘glorious baptism’ of eighty-nine candidates but no mention of the Ukrainians. Some months later Pritzkau reported that with the baptism of fifty Germans, a Russian brother, although unexamined, entered the water on impulse and was immersed. In his history many years later, Pritzkau claimed Tsimbal

⁸ *Quarterly Reporter*, Sep. 1869, pp. 359-60. Johann E. Pritzkau, *Geschichte der Baptisten in Süd-Russland* (Odessa: Wenske und Lübeck, 1914), pp. 34-35.

⁹ For the report of the chief of police, see Aleksii Dorodnitsyn (Episkop Aleksii), *Materialy dlya istorii religiozno-ratsionalisticheskago dvizheniya na yuge Rossii vo vtoroi polovine xix-go stoletiya* (Kazan, 1908), document 58. For Johann Pritzkau's reports, see *Missionsblatt*, Sep. 1869, pp. 143-4, and Apr. 1870, pp. 66-68; *Quarterly Reporter*, act. 1869, pp. 394-95, and July 1870, pp. 836-38; and Pritzkau, *Geschichte*, pp. 13-14. For information on the Ukrainian girl, see *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten*, XXV (Sep. 1869), pp. 419-20.

intermingled with the candidates and was baptised without Unger knowing his identity.

In 1873 Karl Ondra, a German Baptist pastor from Volhynia in Ukraine but not present at the baptism, wrote that Tsimbal, without pressure from anyone, quickly undressed and entered the water without Unger realising who he was. Five years later, Ondra stated that Unger, realising what had happened, became alarmed and quickly left for home, not remaining for the Lord's Supper that immediately followed.¹⁰

How inadvertent was Tsimbal's baptism as German Baptists claimed? Many years ago, in 1957, Michael Klimenko, in his dissertation on Ukrainian Stundo-Baptism, 'Anfänge des Baptismus in Südrussland (Ukraine) nach offiziellen Dokumenten', raised this question. In his report, the police chief, noting only thirty had been baptised, recorded that the village magistrate was under suspicion and found himself in trouble for failing to stop Tsimbal. Why did Unger baptise instead of Johann Pritzkau, who, by the way, was baptising a short time later? Was Pritzkau protecting himself in an act that could mean exile or imprisonment? Would it not be expedient to have an outsider who could claim he did not personally know all the candidates? By the way, Unger himself became acquainted with the candidates during their interrogation and could have possibly recognised a stranger. Did Tsimbal decide on baptism on the spur of the moment? Would he not at least have prepared himself to wear a linen garment under his other clothes, which he would then cast off, to be an acceptable candidate? If Tsimbal, a Ukrainian and unexamined, could intermix so suddenly with the baptismal candidates, why did anyone not stop him? One should note that the baptism of the Ukrainian girl was done by breaking the law and so those in charge of baptising were thus already taking their chances. Why did Unger leave so precipitously after the baptism?

Whatever the circumstances, the baptism of the two Ukrainians was done. The diocesan authority asked the governor of the Kherson Province to bring Tsimbal to trial and the one who had seduced him. The governor did not act, stating that he could not prosecute without a formal request from the spiritual authority. It appears the matter was dropped.¹¹

Tsimbal himself now began to baptise candidates, immersing, a few weeks later, three persons and then later twenty-one more. He also went to the adjoining village, almost certainly Lyubomirka, where he baptised three more, including Petr Griva, Yakov Taran, and Ivan Ryaboshapka, the stundist leader of the area. A succession of baptisers now emerged with

¹⁰ *Der Sendbote*, 19 Oct., 1873, p. 171. *Missionsblatt*, May, 1878, p. 84.

¹¹ Arsenii Rozhdestvenskii, *Yuzhnorusskii shtundizm* (St Petersburg, 1889), pp.101-102.

Tsimbal baptising Ryaboshapka, and, in June 1871, Ryaboshapka baptising fifty candidates, including Mikail T. Ratushnyi, the leader of the stundists in the Odessa region. Believer's baptism by immersion was now spreading rapidly among Ukrainian stundists.¹²

In the former Russian Empire, probably over 340,000 members are in various Evangelical Christian-Baptist Unions and independent Evangelical Christian bodies. Outside the Baltic area, the Lutheran Church, through institutional destruction under Communism, exile, and migration is today only a small minority. With the rapid growth of Pentecostal and charismatic congregations that practice believer's baptism, believer's baptism by immersion is today the norm for most Protestants in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. This is far different from what this practice faced when it began in the mid-nineteenth century.

Dr Albert W Wardin, Jr, is a renowned Baptist historian.

¹² *Missionsblatt*, Apr. 1870, pp. 66-67. *Quarterly Reporter*, July 1870, pp. 836-38. Rozhdestvenski, p. 102. Dorodnitsyn, document 124.

Book Reviews

Pulpit and People: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Baptist Life and Thought

Edited by John H.Y. Briggs

Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2009, 208 pages, ISBN 9781842 274033

This is volume 28 in the *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, in an outstanding series of over forty-five volumes seeking to explore important areas of baptistic life and thought from the 1500s until the present day.

Generally the 1700s are regarded as a period in Baptist life where applied theology and an accent on missiology gave way to a form of theological exploration. This led to Unitarianism amongst the General Baptists and to a form of speculative theological Calvinism amongst Particular Baptists, only broken later in the century by the renewal of theological reflection associated with Andrew Fuller, in what is now often termed evangelical Calvinism.

The volume provides a selection of essays by leading Baptist scholars challenging generalised perceptions and opening up a more varied theological and ecclesiological landscape amongst Baptists. John Briggs provides an overview as editor and contributor of chapter one. In his distinctive and engaging style he links various important characters together and points out that a hyper Calvinist soteriology was often mediated by an eschatology which assumed a missionary endeavour. Baptists of both persuasions became embroiled in doctrinal difficulties during the century, but were largely rescued from this by the evangelical revival at the end of the century.

Later in the century, John Rippon and the young William Carey helped Baptists understand that they were part of a wider world and this was in advance of other Christian traditions in the isles. We are reminded that this is the century where hymn singing becomes much more of a practice and sermons began to move outwith a boundary of biblical and theological analysis to engage with contemporary issues such as the slave trade.

The essays introduce us to Benjamin Keach, untaught, but ultimately a leading London preacher; to Hubert Stogdon, James Foster, Charles Bulkeley, Benjamin Beddom, Daniel Turner – pastors in the southern counties noted for their search for the basis of a ‘simple Christianity’. There is an excellent essay on Andrew Fuller and his leap out of hyper-Calvinism by Peter Morden, and Roger Hayden helps us understand the position adopted by Caleb Evans in Bristol on the issue of slavery. It is

interesting to learn of Martha Gurney – one single woman amongst so many men – and her work as a dissenting printer in London.

Overall, this volume provides valuable insights about individuals who achieved some prominence in the century and, as a whole, gives us fresh insights into a period where it is far too easy to make facile generalisations. It essentially focuses on pastors in the south of England and perhaps a similar volume is needed for the north and midlands.

Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS, Prague

Historical Dictionary of the Baptists (second edition)

William H. Brackney

Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009, 628 pages, ISBN 42123 74475

Scarecrow Press has a series of 94 (currently) dictionaries of which this is a very significant one.

Bill Brackney has produced an amazing work, seeking to provide a wide range of entries about Baptists from William Aberhart to Baptists in Zimbabwe. Inevitably the volume is weighted to Baptists in the USA, but Brackney has drawn on thirty-plus years of wider Baptist involvement and the insights of friends throughout the world Baptist family to produce this remarkable and impressive volume.

Brackney provides a comprehensive and invaluable guide to Baptist leaders and institutions across the world. This volume is useful to set alongside *The Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* which provides more insights on theology and worship than the Brackney volume. Though not featuring centres of theological education, Brackney, strangely, includes references to non-Baptist centres of theological education such as London Bible College, whilst omitting references to Baptist institutions. He appears to concentrate on individuals, especially in North America, and denominational institutions. With a lifetime of involvement in theological education, sadly he neglects this important area of Baptist life.

Clearly, anyone can pick holes in the work of one individual; there is no entry for John Fawcett (though highlighted as if an entry should have been included), whilst William Steadman has an entry; M.E. Aubrey is ignored and E.A. Payne is credited with taking the British Baptist Union into the World Council of Churches, but surely Aubrey sorted this out? Over against these omissions a full note on Michael H. Taylor and George Beasley-Murray is included.

Whilst there are deficiencies, this work should be welcomed and highly commended. Bill Brackney has carried off a tour de force and is to be congratulated.

Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS, Prague

Exploring Baptist Origins

Edited by Anthony R. Cross and Nicholas J. Wood

Foreword by John H.Y. Briggs

Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, Volume 1

Regent's Park College, Oxford, 2010, 176 pages, ISBN 978-0-9539746-6-5

The volume is a collection of seven essays based on papers delivered at Regent's Park College, Oxford, in the autumn of 2009. In the words of Nicolas J. Wood, one of its editors, '[i]t is a contribution by Regent's Park College to the events marking the 400th Anniversary of the formation of the first English Baptist church in Amsterdam in 1609' (p. xvi).

The papers invite the reader to participate in the exploration of the various aspects of Baptist beginnings. In the initial essay, Anthony R. Cross brings fresh insights into the adoption of believer's baptism by the community of English exiles in Holland in the early seventeenth century who came to be known as Baptists. An analysis of the language of 'church' and 'sect' in relation to Baptist types of community is offered by Paul S. Fiddes. He questions ready-made assumptions that the early Baptist movement was sectarian in nature and argues for a more nuanced understanding of the terms used in describing stages in the historical development of Baptist ecclesiology.

Brian Haymes' examination of Thomas Helwys', *The Mystery of Iniquity*, probes the context of this nearly 400-year-old treatise by one of the Baptist founding fathers and assesses its relevance for the present age. Conversely, Larry J. Kreitzer draws attention to the two less known petitions of Anabaptists to the English Parliament in the early 1660s. His study of the political and religious climate within which the two petitions arose discloses an early case of church-state clashes of seventeenth century England to which Baptists did not stay immune. The religious scene of the mid seventeenth century is also partly explored by Crawford Gribben who concentrates on the study of eschatological and millennial commitments among early modern English Baptists. The eschatological concern continued to be present in Baptist ecclesiology throughout the eighteenth century. A high Calvinist, John Gill, receives specific attention in Gribben's essay as a classic representative of millennial theology of that

era. Stephen R. Holmes turns attention to the hermeneutics of reading the Scripture within the community of faith, examining pivotal points in Baptist history that relate to Christology. Despite Baptist affirmations of being resistant to the impact of the surrounding cultural context, Holmes makes an observation that cultural and philosophical assumptions of a particular era are reflected in Baptist causes of that particular time.

The volume concludes with an essay of Keith G. Jones widening the horizon to include the continental European context as well as drawing on an older Anabaptist story. The chapter is woven together by a biographic narrative of a three-generation Lithuanian Baptist family, out of which Jones draws issues relevant for Baptists today, among them the nature of pastoral ministry and mission, spirituality, music, and the ministry of women.

The volume is a welcome contribution to the serious study of who Baptists are and what shaped their identity from their beginnings. Anyone who wishes to dig deeper into understanding Baptist roots should read this book.

Lydie Kucová
Registrar, IBTS, Prague